

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 MCT-01 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9033
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT 837
US MISSION USUN NEW YORK 692
CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 543

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PBOR, SS, MR
SUBJ: SAHARA WATCH: TRAIN DERAILMENT AND POSSIBLE SABOTAGE AT NOUADHIBOU

REF: A) NOUAKCHOTT 487

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED - NOUAKCHOTT AFP DISPATCH (CARRIED IN
MARCH 1 ISSUE SENEGALESE DAILY LE SOLEIL) REPORTS DETAILS OF
LATEST TRAIN DERAILMENT ON FEBRUARY 25 AT NOUADHIBOU, LABELS ACT
AS SABOTAGE, AND ESTIMATES CASUALTIES AT 6 DEAD AND 20 WOUNDED.
DISPATCH CHARACTERIZED T EXPLOSIONS-ONE IN AN UNOCCUPIED
DISCOTHEQUE, ANOTHER NEAR NAVAL BARRACKS -- AS OF CRIMINAL NATURE
AND DESCRIBED EVENTS AS FIRST TIME APART FROM MAY 1, 1977 ATTACK
ON ZOUERATE, THAT A FORM OF TERRORIST VIOLENCE HAS OCCURRED IN
THE HEART OF AN IMPORTANT MAURITANIAN CENTER. AFP QUOTES COMINOR
EXPATRIATE AS ACKNOWLEDGING THE SITUATION AS PARTICULARLY FORMIDABLE
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DUE TO THE DIFFICULTY OF CONTROLLING AND IMPOSSIBILITY OF FORE-
SEEING SUCH EVENTS. TWO HUNDRED METERS OF DAMAGED TRACK REPORTED
RESTORED AND CONTINUATION OF TRAIN OPERATIONS EXPECTED RESUME
IMMEDIATELY. DISPATCH QUESTIONS HOWEVER HOW MUCH TIME REMAINS
BEFORE NEXT ATTACK AND HOW EFFECTIVE FRENCH AND MOROCCAN PRESENCE
CAN BE AGAINST SUCH TACTICS, DESPITE STEPPED-UPQHSECURITY PROCEDURES,
NOTABLE MULTIPLICATION OF MILITARY PATROLS. REPORT ALSO INDICATES

REDUCTION OF AVAILABLE LOCLMOTIVES BY FOUR REPRESENTS A DANGEROUSLY LOW LEVEL FOR MAXIMUM CONTINUED OPERATION. AS OF NOON MARCH 2 MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT (GIRM) HAS MADE NO OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON NOUADHIBOU INCIDENTS. END UNCLASSIFIED

2. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL: AFP CORRESPONDENT WHO HAD VISITED SCENE OF DERAILMENT TOLD EMBOFF OS ATTEMPTS BY UNNAMED GIRM SOURCES TO PERSUADE HIM TO REPORT INCIDENT AS QUOTE ACCIDENTAL END QUOTE.

3. COMMENT: SABOTAGE IN NOUADHIBOU SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING TO THOSE WHO REMEMBER THAT CITY WAS HEADQUARTERS FOR POLISARIO MOVEMENT

DURING PRE-UNIFICATION YEARS 1973-1975 AND CITY CAN BE PRESUMED TO STILL HARBOR SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF POLISARIO SYMPATHIZERS. SOCIETE NATIONALE INDUSTRIELLE ET MINIERE (SNIM) OPERATIONS CONTINUE NORMALLY. DIRECTOR GENERAL ISHMAEL OULD AMAR AND DELEGATION OF ARAB INVESTORS IN GUELBS PROJECT LEFT MARCH 1 FOR NOUADHIBOU TO OBSERVE SNIM FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS. SNIM SOURCES ARE REFERRING PRIVATELY TO DERAILMENT ALTERNATIVELY AS ACCIDENT OR SABOTAGE

BUT STATE THAT FULL INVESTIGATION IS UNDERWAY AND FINAX REPORT WILL BE AVAILABLE. SNIM SECRETARY GENERAL TOLD EMBOFF THAT REPAIR OF FOUR ENGINES DAMAGED EARLIER FEBRUARY 20 ATTACK (REF A) WILL TAKE 15 DAYS AND REPORTED THAT TWO FULL TRAINS CARRYING 15,000 TONS EACH ARRIVED NOUADHIBOU MORNING MARCH 1.

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4. SUNDAY FEBRUARY 26 EXPLOSIONS MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED BY POLISARIO TO MARK NATION-WIDE CELEBRATIONS OF SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF REUNIFICATION OF SOUTHERN PORTION OF FORMER SPANISH SAHARA WITH MAURITANIA. WIDESPREAD CELEBRATIONS WERE HELD IN NOUAKCHOTT AND WE ARE NOT AWARE OF ANY OTHER POLISARIO ACTIVITIES EXCEPT THOSE IN NOUADHIBU. PRESIDENT OULD DADDAH TOOK OFF MORNING FEBRUARY 26 FOR 24-HOUR VISIT TO MALI. THUS FAR, FORTUNATELY FOR NOUAKCHOTT RESIDENTS, POLISARIO HAS RESISTED TEMPTATIONS TO SABOTAGE VARIOUS SYMBOLIC TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY IN NOUAKCHOTT AND OTHER POPULATION CENTERS IN FAVOR OF CONCENTRATION ON OBJECTIVE OF DISRUPTION RAIL LINE OPERATIONS END CONFIDENTIAL YARLEY

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